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# EASING TENSIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST COULD RAISE INDONESIA'S INTERNATIONAL STANDING

Luciano Magaldi / 11/07/2022 / 0

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Indonesian Defence Minister Lieutenant General Prabowo Subianto made it very clear during his speech at the Shangri-La Summit held in Singapore last month that Indonesia will not take sides in disputes between major powers. General Subianto emphasized the necessity for an "Asian manner", which he defines as each country having its own distinct strategy for coping with issues "in a mutually beneficial way without resorting to any force", while maintaining harmonious relations with other states.

Such an 'Asian manner' strategy could be demonstrated by Indonesia's invitation of Russia and Ukraine to the G20 leaders conference held in Bali (Indonesia) in November 2022. Although the West threatened to boycott the summit because the Indonesian President Joko Widodo decided to Invite Putin, who launched a brutal invasion of Ukraine in February to the conference, Widodo refused to give in. He stated that Indonesia wanted to bring the G20 countries together rather than cause tensions, so it should maintain its neutrality and still invite Russia to the conference despite Western opposition.

Meanwhile, even though Ukraine is not a G20 member, the Indonesian president did extend an invitation to the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to attend the summit. Widodo would like to take this opportunity to call for an immediate end to Russo-Ukrainian hostilities, so that tensions between Russia and Ukraine could be cooled.

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In late June, Widodo further expanded his Asian manner strategy to try to resolve Russo-Ukrainian tension and the international issues brought by the conflict peacefully. On 29th June 2022, Widodo travelled to Ukraine on 29th June 2022. claimed that his trip to Ukraine served as a reminder of both Indonesia's "concern" for the situation there and its support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. The president of Indonesia visited the war-torn Ukrainian city of Irpin, which had been brutally bombarded by Russian forces, and had a meeting with Zelensky in Kyiv – the Indonesian President visited an apartment complex destroyed by air strikes. Zelensky praised the president of Indonesia for his support and emphasized the fact that he was the first Asian leader to visit Ukraine since the outbreak of the military conflict.

One day later (30th June 2022), the President of Indonesia met with Putin in Russia to negotiate some food issues. While Putin continued to blame Western sanctions and military support for Ukraine for Russia's inability to sell grain, the meeting has yielded fruitful results. Putin agreed to meet the demand for fertiliser from farmers in Indonesia and other "friendly" nations. He has promised to guarantee food and fertilize imports from Russia and Ukraine. Widodo has described this as "fantastic news for humanity". He added that many people, particularly in underdeveloped countries, have been hurt by the interruption of the supply lines for food and fertilizer.

This meeting also serves another purpose, which is delivering Zelensky's message to Putin. The president of Indonesia has declared his willingness to serve as a "communication bridge" between Russia and Ukraine. Widodo is eager to enhance multilateral relations peacefully.

However, it remains uncertain whether Widodo has successfully brought Russia and Ukraine (as well as the West) together. Russia has not yet confirmed Putin's attendance at the G20 Summit in person. Dmitry Peskov, a spokesman for the Kremlin, stated that no decision had been made in this regard.

Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that western countries which had threatened to boycott the G20 Summit have said that they will still attend it since a boycott would prohibit them from offering a different perspective to that of Russia.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently claimed that by abstaining from the meeting, western nations would merely be handing China and Russia "the whole argument". Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister of Canada, agreed with Johnson that it was important to counter Russia's propaganda, and

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Mario Draghi, the Prime Minister of Italy, hinted at Italy's opposition to a boycott at the conclusion of the G7 Summit in Germany given that Putin was not likely to personally attend the G20 summit.

The G20 summit now appears to be a platform for confrontation. Widodo will need to make more efforts in addressing their hostility to realize his vision of peace.

Easing tensions between Russia and Ukraine as well as the West is ultimately a difficult task for Indonesia. However, if President Widodo is successful in relieving the two camps' tensions, he will have accomplished his most crucial objective: improving Indonesia's standing in international politics. Indonesia could become more capable of negotiating with different parties in global inter-system conflicts.

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